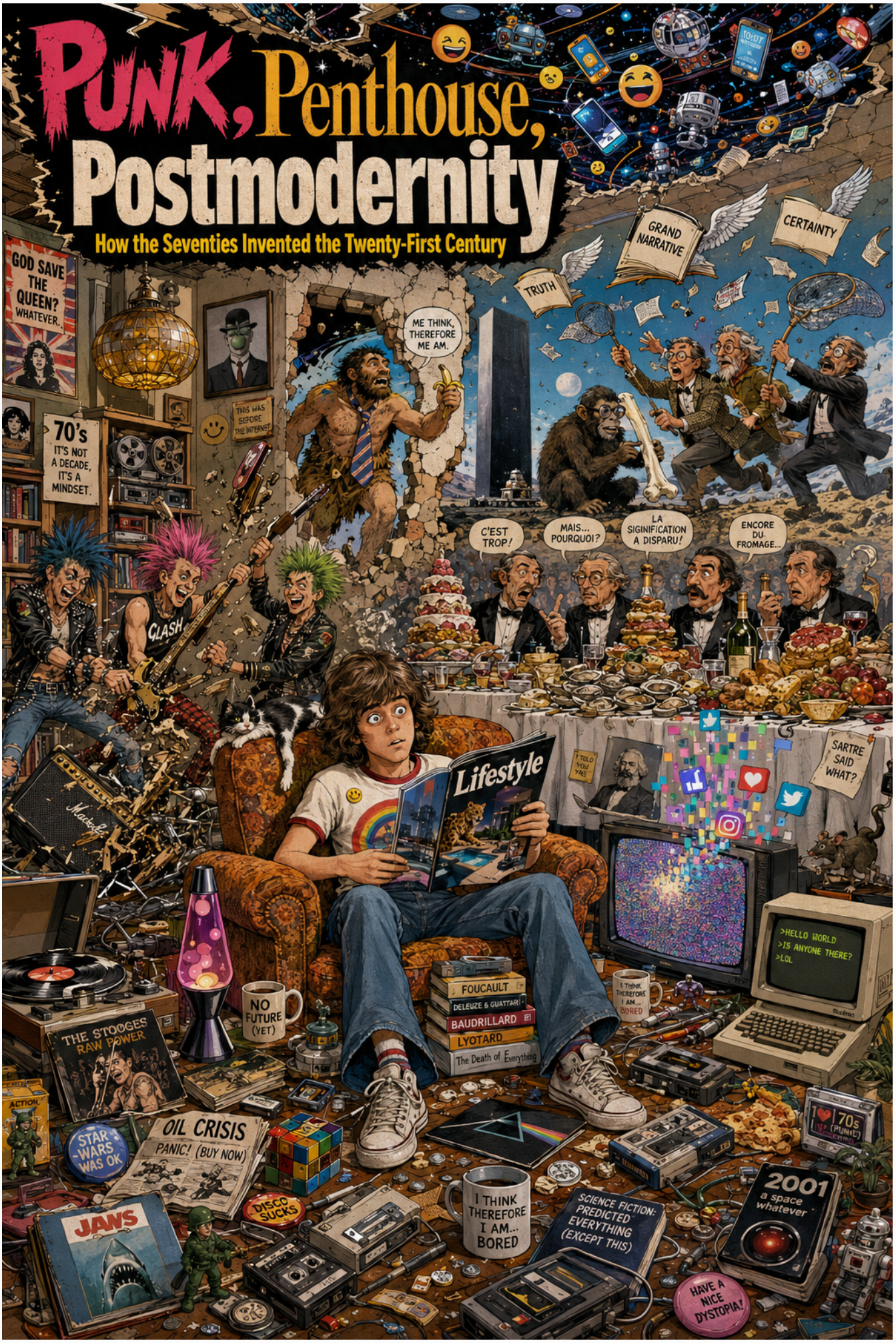
PUNK, Penthouse, Postmodernity
How the Seventies Invented the Twenty-First Century
GOD SAVE THE QUEEN? WHATEVER.
70's IT'S NOT A DECADE, IT'S A MINDSET.
THIS WAS BEFORE THE INTERNET
ME THINK, THEREFORE ME AM.
TRUTH
GRAND NARRATIVE
CERTAINTY
C'EST TROP!
MAIS... POURQUOI?
LA SIGINIFICATION A DISPARU!
ENCORE DU FROMAGE...
CLASH
Lifestyle
SARTRE SAID WHAT?
>HELLO WORLD
>IS ANYONE THERE?
>LOL
FOUCAULT
DELEUZE & GUATTARI
BAUDRILLARD
LYOTARD
The Death of Everything
NO FUTURE (YET)
THE STOOGES RAW POWER
OIL CRISIS
PANIC! (BUY NOW)
STAR WARS WAS OK
DISCO SUCKS
JAWS
I THINK THEREFORE I AM... BORED
SCIENCE FICTION: PREDICTED EVERYTHING (EXCEPT THIS)
2001 a space whatever
HAVE A NICE DYSTOPIA!

History books usually introduce the 1970s with oil crises, inflation, political terrorism and the occasional photograph of men wearing sideburns large enough to have their own postal code.

They are not wrong. They are simply criminally un-imaginative.

The real invention of the 1970s was the twenty-first century.

Allow me to present the evidence.

Imagine a lonely teenager sitting at home. His stepfather owns an impressive archaeological collection of *Penthouse*

magazines.

They are stacked like sacred scrolls from an erotic monastery.

The teenager speaks almost no English.

He therefore skips the articles, interviews and political commentary,

accidentally inventing the modern internet browsing experience fifty years ahead of schedule.

He studies the photographs.

Not in today's sense of scrolling past six hundred bodies before breakfast.

No.

Each magazine is an expedition. Every page is explored with the seriousness of an Egyptologist dusting off another pharaoh.

Scarcity creates attention.

Today we consume millions of images.

Back then, a single issue could keep your imagination occupied for weeks.

Pornography had not yet become fast food. It was still a slow-cooked French dinner.

Speaking of French dinners...

Fast forward to *La Grande Bouffe*.

Four respectable gentlemen decide that civilization has reached its logical conclusion:

If consumption is good, unlimited consumption must be paradise.

They therefore eat until their bodies resign from employment.

It is probably the only philosophical film in which digestion is the central plot device.

Watching oysters disappear by the truckload while soft erotic pictures circulate in the background, one suddenly realizes that modern civilization is remarkably

inventive.

It builds cathedrals, invents antibiotics, sends astronauts to the Moon—and eventually discovers that one can literally consume oneself to death.

Progress.

Then comes *Themroc*.

If *La Grande Bouffe* is civilization suffering from obesity, *Themroc* is civilization filing for divorce.

Our hero abandons language, tears down the walls of his apartment, climbs buildings, grunts enthusiastically and behaves like an ape who has become deeply disappointed

with office work.

At first this appears insane.

Then Monday morning arrives, and one begins to understand him.

Watching *Themroc* after *2001: A Space Odyssey* creates an unexpected intellectual traffic accident.

Kubrick starts with apes becoming civilized.

Themroc politely asks whether civilization was perhaps a clerical error.

One ape discovers the bone.

The other discovers unemployment.

Both change history.

Around the same time
another tribe emerges.

Punks.

Punk is often misunderstood
as loud music played by
people who had declared war
on hairbrushes.

This is unfair.

Punk was not merely music.

It was philosophy wearing safety pins.

Modernity had promised endless progress, rationality and a glorious future.

Punk looked around at unemployment, concrete housing estates and political hypocrisy and politely replied:

"No thanks."

Actually, not politely.

More like:

"Bugger off."

Meanwhile, somewhere inside French universities, postmodern philosophers reached almost exactly the same conclusion.

Only slower.

Punk smashed the guitar.

Postmodernism wrote three

hundred pages questioning whether "guitar" was a socially constructed category produced by capitalist discourse.

Both distrusted authority.

Both laughed at certainty.

One used distortion pedals.

The other footnotes.

This is why I increasingly suspect that postmodernity is simply punk after learning to drink red wine instead of cheap beer.

Then there is *Penthouse*.

Poor *Penthouse*.

It thought it was merely publishing beautiful women.

Instead it quietly participated in dismantling another great certainty.

Desire itself escaped the Victorian living room.

Bodies appeared with an openness that would have

scandalized grandparents and now barely interrupts someone's coffee break on Instagram.

Ironically, the magazines accomplished something stranger than sexual liberation.

They became aesthetic education.

Looking back, I sometimes wonder whether those glossy pages taught me less about women than about femininity itself.

Perhaps that explains why, decades later, I occasionally smile at the mirror and think: "So... apparently I grew into an elderly, slightly

philosophical, trans Penthouse model."

Not exactly according to Bob Guccione's business plan.

Life rarely follows editorial guidelines.

Looking around today, it becomes difficult not to notice that the twenty-first

century resembles an unruly child raised collectively by Punk, Penthouse and Postmodernity.

Social media is punk's refusal of gatekeepers.

Influencers inherited Penthouse's understanding that images shape desire.

Artificial intelligence inherited postmodernism's suspicion that originality may have been exaggerated all along.

We live inside the family reunion.

No wonder everybody argues.

Perhaps this is the strangest

lesson of the seventies.

History does not always march.

Sometimes it grunts like *Themroc*, overeats like *La Grande Bouffe*, tears its jeans like a punk, poses under soft studio lights for *Penthouse*, quotes Derrida at dinner parties, and eventually

uploads selfies generated by artificial intelligence.

The twenty-first century did not appear out of nowhere.

It simply put on better Wi-Fi.

The seventies are not over.

They have merely gone digital.